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NEW EVIDENCE ADDS TO CONCERNS OF WIDESPREAD ASBESTOS EXPOSURE IN SCHOOLS

LONDON – Tuesday, 2nd March 2010 – Shocking new data from a previously unpublished government report was unveiled today by *Clinica MedTech Intelligence*, indicating that the problem of asbestos exposure in schools is worse than previously publicised.

New evidence emerged last week of the suspected widespread failure of UK schools to observe asbestos safety regulations, heightening concerns that children, teachers and other staff are being exposed to the carcinogen. But *Clinica* can also reveal, exclusively, that scientific calculations on exposure levels in schools and other specific environments were omitted from official guidance published 11 years ago.

An unpublished "final draft" of a Department of the Environment (DETR) document, *Asbestos and man-made mineral fibres in buildings*, dated August 1998, obtained by *Clinica*, adds to mounting concerns about the safety of children and those working in schools. A table of "lifetime" exposure calculations and estimates of the impact of poorly maintained or deteriorating asbestos-containing materials on contamination levels, was omitted from the final published version of the guidance document dated August 1999.

The table calculates that school-children will breathe three million fibres during their 12-year schooling life, based on a level of 0.0005 fibres per millilitre (f/ml) of air, as attributed to an interior environment with asbestos materials in "good condition".

Of this "good condition" estimate, Michael Lees, a schools asbestos safety campaigner, is scathing: "That might be the case in some schools, but all the asbestos is now old and much is deteriorating," he told *Clinica*. "It has been found that when you slam doors, hit the walls or sit on the window sills, the levels can be up to 0.33 f/ml and 0.44 f/ml [660-880 times higher]," he explained.

Even as far back as 1967, the government's advisory committee on asbestos had warned the Department of Education of the general health risks posed by low-level exposure, and that children are particularly at risk; it urged the government to ensure the tightest controls.

For Mr Lees, the government has failed comprehensively in this regard: "It could never admit the fact that just being in a school is killing people," he told *Clinica*. "But it's the awful truth", he added.

The evidence that controls are failing in some schools is irrefutable, but the concern is that they may actually be failing in many – if not most – of the UK's 27,000 schools. Around 75%

are currently thought to contain asbestos, but only a national programme of surveys can properly determine the exact extent of any problems, as the basis for actions to ensure that all schools are made safe.

After dragging their feet, ostensibly over liability and compensation policies, the UK government is, at last, in the throes of creating a National Centre for Asbestos-Related Diseases (NCARD). The growing evidence of asbestos exposure – particularly to the most vulnerable members of our society – means that asbestos disease research is now more important than ever and will be for decades to come.

For the full story in Clinica MedTech Intelligence, please see: www.clinica.co.uk